

# **Hamilton County Traffic Safety Partnership**

## **P R E S S   R E L E A S E**

March 5, 2013

### **Upcoming Sobriety Checkpoints:**

**March 8<sup>th</sup> – March 9<sup>th</sup>**

*and*

**March 16<sup>th</sup> – March 17<sup>th</sup>**

Beginning Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, the Hamilton County Traffic Safety Partnership (HCTSP) will deploy a high-visibility crackdown on impaired and dangerous driving known as *Drive Sober or Get Pulled Over*. The sixteen-day effort will continue through March 24<sup>th</sup> – encompassing a number of March sporting events and the St. Patrick's Day holiday.

HCTSP is a consortium of law enforcement agencies in Hamilton County working to increase the usage of seatbelts, to combat aggressive driving, and to decrease impaired driving with the overall goal of creating a safer Hamilton County. The HCTSP is comprised of the Hamilton County Sheriff's Department, Fishers Police Department, Carmel Police Department, Noblesville Police Department, and the Westfield Police Department with the assistance of the Indiana State Police.

"This enforcement effort is about showing a strong and visible police presence aimed at deterring dangerous behaviors and getting drunk drivers off the streets," said Amy B Summerfield, Deputy Prosecuting Attorney and Hamilton County's Fatal Alcohol Crash Team prosecutor. "Similar to New Years, we want Indiana motorists to be fully aware of our increased enforcement so that it will encourage people to designate a sober driver or to make alternate arrangements to get home safely."

For many Hoosiers, the month of March is synonymous with celebrating Indiana basketball traditions and the St. Patrick's Day holiday. However, due to the increased rate of alcohol consumption these events inspire, the month of March can also be a very dangerous time on Indiana roadways.

**Prosecuting Attorney  
for the 24<sup>th</sup> Judicial Circuit**

**Hamilton  
County  
Sheriff's  
Department**

**Carmel  
Police  
Department**

**Fishers  
Police  
Department**

**Noblesville  
Police  
Department**

**Westfield  
Police  
Department**

**Indiana  
State  
Police**

Last year, there were 6,264 alcohol-related collisions in Indiana with ninety-seven fatalities. Just last year on St. Patrick's Day, there were thirty-three alcohol related collisions in the state.

Impaired driving is one of our nation's most frequently committed violent crimes. Just in Indiana in 2010, alcohol-related traffic crashes killed 168 people, accounting for approximately twenty-five percent of all fatal crashes.

About 1100 people are convicted of an impaired driving offense annually in Hamilton County alone, and nearly 200 of those are repeat offenders. In 2011 in Hamilton County, for example, the State filed 1,192 charges of operating while intoxicated. Of these, 175 drivers had prior convictions for operating while intoxicated within the last five years.

To combat this crime, the Hamilton County Traffic Safety Partnership will be setting up sobriety checkpoints around Hamilton County to aggressively deter, detect, and arrest those drivers who make the decision to drive impaired. Sobriety checkpoints have proven successful in both raising awareness of impaired driving and reducing the likelihood of a person driving after they have been drinking.

**A sobriety checkpoint will be conducted on the night of Friday, March 8<sup>th</sup> and the early hours of Saturday, March 9<sup>th</sup>. Another sobriety checkpoint is planned for the night of Saturday, March 16<sup>th</sup> and the early hours of Sunday, March 17<sup>th</sup>.**

In order to raise awareness of the prevalence of impaired driving in our community and the efforts of the Partnership to combat the crime, the Partnership maintains a webpage at <http://www.hamiltoncounty.in.gov/topic/?topicid=36&structureid=26>.

At a sobriety checkpoint, law enforcement officers evaluate drivers for signs of alcohol or drug impairment at a specified point along the roadway, often depending upon the support of local property owners for the use of appropriate land. Checkpoint sites are selected based upon analysis of available crash and impaired driving arrest data and a consideration of officer safety.

Vehicles are stopped in a specific sequence, such as every other vehicle, every third vehicle, every fourth vehicle or by stopping three, four, or five cars in succession and allowing other traffic to proceed while checking the stopped vehicles. The planned sequence in which vehicles are stopped depends on the number of officers available to staff the checkpoint, traffic congestion, and other safety concerns.

Upon making contact with the driver, the officer advises them that they've been stopped at an HCTSP sobriety checkpoint and asks for the driver's license and the vehicle's registration. If, in the course of the contact, the officer detects that alcohol may be involved and that the driver may be impaired or if some other issue arises, then the vehicle is directed into a pull-off area for further investigation. Further investigation may involve the Standardized Field Sobriety Tests (SFSTs). On the other hand, if all looks right during the initial contact, the driver is often on his or her way in less than two minutes.

Officers staffing the sobriety checkpoints work on an overtime basis paid by grant funds from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration through the Indiana Governor's Council on Impaired and Dangerous Driving.

Sobriety checkpoints are legal in 39 states, including Indiana, and the District of Columbia. In 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, if conducted properly, sobriety checkpoints do not constitute an illegal search and seizure. In the 2002 case of *State v. Gerschoffer*, the Indiana Supreme Court found that sobriety checkpoints are constitutional when conducted properly. Members of the Hamilton County Prosecuting Attorney's Office work with the Partnership to ensure that each checkpoint meets constitutional requirements.

Should you have any questions regarding these sobriety checkpoints, please contact Deputy Prosecuting Attorney [Amy Summerfield](#) or Chief Deputy Prosecuting Attorney [Andre Miksha](#) at 317-776-8595.

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